DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 201 608 SP 017 826

AUTHOR Beechy, Atlee; Beechy, Winifred
TITLE Study and Service in China.
INSTITUTION Goshen Coll., Ind.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 7p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Patterns; Cultural Differences; *Cultural Exchange; *Exchange Programs; Field Trips; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Humanism; *International Programs; Interpersonal Competence; Philosophy; Preservice Teacher Education; Program Evaluation; Religion; *Student Attitudes; Student Characteristics; Teacher Education Programs; Values
IDENTIFIERS *China; *Goshen College IN

ABSTRACT

A description is given of the ten-week Goshen College Study-Service Trimester experiment at Sichuan Teachers College in China. Goshen College emphasizes international education and has a requirement in this area for all of its graduates. The trimester exchange program was developed to promote international education and world peace and prepare persons for active service in the world. As a part of the China-Goshen exchange program, eight teachers of English from Sichuan Province studied at Goshen College for nine months. The ten week field assignment for twenty Goshen students and two faculty members was in the English Language Department of Sichuan College. Pairs of Goshen students spent three hours a day in formal and informal classroom activities with Chinese students. The activities and field trips of the Americans are described, and the impressions the students had of China and their Chinese peers are summarized. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED201608

Study And Service In China

By Atlee and Winifred Beechy

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Atlee Beechy
Winifred Beechy

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Goshen COLLEGE GOSHEN INDIANA 46526 | *Making An Imprint On The World*

SP 017 826

Study And Service In China

By Atlee and Winifred Beechy

"The body travels more easily than the mind and until we have limbered up our imaginations, we continue to think as though we had stayed home," John Erskine once said. "We have not really budged a step until we take up residency in someone else's point of view." In one sense this is what liberal education and the struggle for international understanding and peace is all about. The Goshen College Study-Service Trimester in China was an effort to take up "residency in someone else's point of view."

What was the emotional climate as our group began the China experience?

An Aug. 26, 1980, journal entry, written in Tokyo the evening before our flight to Peking reads, "I wonder what Cheryl, Bruce, Metz, Cal, Cecilia, Julie and the other 14 students are thinking this evening. It seems unreal—boggles the mind. We are about to cross a curtain into a room we know little about. The past is prologue. The now is here. We look to tomorrow and the days that follow with a mixture of thoughts and feelings, eagerness and uncertainty, awe and wonderment, anxiety and hope, gratefulness and joy."

A few days later there was excitement mixed with anxiety aboard the train from Peking as it neared Chengdu on the night of Sept. 2, 1980. Twenty Goshen College students and two faculty members were about to venture into a trimester experiment in friendship and educational exchange with a Chinese college. The 36-hour train ride through the scenic mountainside cornfields of North China into the rich Sichuan Valley was the last leg of our journey halfway around the world. We were tired and a little apprehensive, yet hopeful and eager to learn. What would be our welcome by these Oriental people sometimes described by Westerners as "inscrutable?" What would the next four months bring?

Our fear of the many unknowns was somewhat allayed by the friendly reception at the railroad station from representatives of the Bureau of Higher Education and Sichuan Teachers College, by the large welcoming banner which greeted us on the college campus, by the hot tea and snacks in the dining room of the new Residence Hall for Foreign Students, and finally by the comfortable rooms prepared for us.

Our visit was made possible by an agreement between the Sichuan Bureau of Higher Education and Goshen College. Sichuan Teachers College was designated as our host institution. Sichuan province, the rice basket of China, is located in West Central China. Sichuan, with a population of 100 million people, has a long and rich history. Chengdu is the province's 2,000-year-old capital. Kings and emperors rose and fell; craftsmen, artists and poets have lived in the "brocade city." Before the 1949 revolution, considerable missionary and church activity took place in Sichuan, including the establishment in Chengdu of West China Christian University, which is known as Chendu Medical College today.

Goshen College emphasizes international education and has had a requirement in this area for all of its graduates since 1969. About 90 percent of the graduates fulfill the requirement by participating in an overseas study-service trimester, commonly called SST. The SST experience offers students the opportunity to learn about the goals, achievements and problems of another culture, to see their own culture in a new perspective, to grow in transcultural understandings and to interpret these new understandings to the Goshen College campus and to the larger community. The program is one expression of the college motto, "Culture for Service," and helps to achieve a central objective of the college, namely the promotion of international education and world peace and the preparation of persons for active service in the world.

As part of the China-Goshen exchange program, eight teachers of English from Sichuan Province studied at Goshen College for nine months, September 1980-May 1981. Two of the teachers are from Sichuan Teachers College, and the remaining six are from other institutions of higher education in the province. The Chinese took a course specifically designed to help them improve their understanding of English and their teaching of English skills. In addition, they chose a number of electives from English department offerings. They opened windows to Chinese life and culture as they related to the campus and to the larger community. They were diligent in their studies and made a significant contribution to the building of friendship between the people of China and America. This aspect of the exchange is very important. The preliminary evidence suggests the exchange has worked well.

China is important for Asia and for what happens in the larger world. Nations, like individuals and groups, behave in part by the perceptions they have of themselves, their role in the world, the role they see for other nations and the role which nations permit each other to play. These relationships are influenced by perceived threats and narrow interests, often resulting in limited or distorted perceptions of each other. The past 30 years illustrate how these perceptions and misunderstandings have influenced the images that the United States and China have had of each other. The labels of friends and enemies have shifted.

The ignorance and fear which Americans have had of China is no doubt matched by the ignorance and fear the Chinese have had of America these past years. Our views have been shaped considerably by false perceptions and distortions. Both Chinese and Americans have seen each other through a screen of cultural, political and historic biases. Fears have thrived on a climate of distrust, on suspicions of a distant people with whom there is little contact. Our goals for the trimester of study and service in China were to learn to know the Chinese people, to correct in a small way the distortions and to begin to bridge the distance that had separated us.

During our short but concentrated stay we lived, studied, played, shared and, above all, learned from Chinese students and faculty. We listened to more than 60 hours of lectures by experts in such fields as Chinese history and culture, economics and politics, education, literature, psychology, music and art. We were taken on more than 20 field trips to visit such places as museums, historic and scenic sites, handicraft workshops, factories, communes, musical performances, hospitals, educational institutions, Buddhist monasteries and pagodas, a Christian church, shopping areas, sports events and a trip to scenic Mount Emei over national holidays.

The 10-week field assignment was in the English Language Department of Sichuan Teachers College. Goshen students, in pairs of two, spent three hours a day in formal and informal classroom activities with Chinese students. These classroom activities and associations provided unusual opportunities for interchange at more than a superficial level, for the development of friendships, for the exploration of differences and commonalities and for providing a needed and appreciated educational service. For the American students the experience opened a window to the thinking, feelings and hopes of Chinese students, and it also opened a window for the Chinese students to American student patterns.

What does the total experience mean? How has it affected our mutual acceptance and respect for each other in spite of very significant differences in social, economic and political systems? One hundred Chinese students and faculty came 10 kilometers to the railroad station to bid us farewell late in the evening of Dec. 13. It was a moment of great emotional intensity. The tears flowed freely, both Chinese and American. The separation, though sad and difficult, was also beautiful. It was beautiful because the separation clearly demonstrated that significant friendships had developed. The development of these intense relationships took an interesting pattern. They moved from an initial climate of uneasiness and curiosity to growing interest in each other, to the discovery of common human elements, to mutual respect for the differences and finally to deep affection.

We used a variety of procedures in evaluating the Goshen College student teachers. We discussed the experiences in weekly seminars. We interviewed small groups of Chinese students from each of the 11 English classes in which our students worked. We tabulated evaluation forms filled out by the 250 Chinese students enrolled. We visited the classrooms. The dean of the English Language Department prepared a written evaluation. The regular Chinese teachers evaluated the work of the American students, and the Goshen College students completed self-evaluation forms.

In response to an open-ended question, "What were the most important things you learned from your American student teachers?" used in the interviews and the written evaluation of Chinese students, the replies centered in three areas. The Chinese students learned about the English language—pronounciation, vocabulary, idioms—and developed additional skills in listening and writing. Secondly, they learned facts and information about America and the values and patterns of Americans. Thirdly, the Chinese students learned from the personal characteristics modeled by our students—caring, modesty, kindness, patience, friendliness, acceptance, conscientiousness, openness and liveliness. There were many discussions about values, philosophy of life, religion and science and the similarities and the differences between the two countries.

What did the American students learn? They placed high on their list what they learned about (1) the experiences, problems, values, hopes and culture of the Chinese; (2) the content and methods of teaching; (3) themselves—their abilities, limitations, patience and self-confidence. What did the American students think they contributed? They listed sincere friendship, assistance in English language usage and a better understanding of America and Americans.

There are risks in such an exchange of "residency" for the Chinese as well as for Americans. But it is only in such an exchange of ideas and experiences that we can move toward more accurate perceptions of each other and discover our common humanity. We obviously are still too close to assess the longer range impact on ourselves and on the Chinese. Goshen students rated it at this time as one of the most significant learning experiences of their lives. The Chinese students involved seemed to respond with equal enthusiasm.

After a mere 4½ months in China, we are very reluctant to list impressions about our experience. Who can begin to know this vast, diverse and complex country and culture? A lifetime would be necessary to begin that process. Who can comprehend the changes taking place in the new China and the changes in the responses of the countries of the world to China? There is a danger of oversimplifying China's complexity and Sino-American relationships. Orville Schell discusses this in his thoughtful essay entitled "Our Mistakes About China" (*Newsweek*, Feb. 16, 1981). It is reminiscent of the story of the blindmen and the elephant. Each person touched a different part—the ear, the trunk, the leg—and each generalized about the elephant on the basis of his experience. So it is with caution that we list the following impressions.

1. We were impressed with the sheer numbers of people living in China. The Chinese, approximately one-fourth of the world's population, live on one-fourteenth of the world's land area. What these one billion people think and do, how they see their role in the world and how the rest of the world responds to them will affect the building of world peace.

2. We were impressed by China's cultural self-consciousness, its ancient highly developed civilization, its rich and varied storehouse of literature, art and music, its cohesive sense of identity through the centuries.

3. We were impressed with the spirit of change and hope centered in the goals of the four modernizations—agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense. The Chinese talk about themselves as being a developing people, behind technologically at the present moment in history and in a hurry to catch up. Modernization promises hope. The Chinese have not only "stood up" (Mao's classic words at the birth of the People's Republic in 1949), but they are running! Achievements in health, agriculture, education and industry, particularly since the cultural revolution, are significant. New incentives and greater flexibility in industrial and commune management have increased production and improved worker morale. The interesting phrases from the constitution, "He who does not work, neither shall he eat" and "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work," projects this emphasis.

4. We were impressed with the friendliness of the Chinese people. This came to us at every turn and on every level. The Chinese told us again and again that it is their duty and privilege to serve us. We felt their genuine interest in and concern for us which, from our perspective, sometimes seemed overly protective.

5. We were impressed with the openness to speak of failures and mistakes of the past, of the current needs and problems. They released statistics describing these. One official said, "We have no starving people but we still have many who have inadequate diets." There is open talk of a growing number of unemployed young persons "waiting to be employed." There is readiness to acknowledge and respect important differences between China and the United States and also to affirm our common needs and interests and to pursue new patterns of cooperation.

6. We were impressed with the pervasive destructiveness of the 10-year (1966-1976) Cultural Revolution for all aspects of Chinese life and the deep scars it has left on intellectuals, professionals, educators, persons with previous Western ties and religious leaders, including Christians. The suffering was widespread and reached into most homes in one form or another. At the recent trial, it was reported that 34,000 deaths resulted from the cultural revolution and that more than 700,000 had been unjustly persecuted, a minimal estimate. The "Gang of Four" receives the primary blame for this great tragedy, but the base of blame is spreading, including Mao and certain other leaders. There are Chinese who feel that the "Gang of Four" serve as a scapegoat for the failures of the past. Currently there is much discussion of the Cultural Revolution, with an emphasis on preventing its happening again.

7. We were impressed by the continuing emphasis on "service to the people," on mutual assistance, on maintaining a strong moral and social fabric in family and community life. There are Chinese who are concerned about possible erosion in some of these values. The economic range between rich and poor has been significantly reduced in China and is much narrower than here in the West. This does not mean, however, that China is a classless society.

8. We were impressed by the strong interest in educational and other exchanges. This is due in part to their seeing exchanges as a way to achieve the four modernizations. The teaching of English and certain other technical areas are important to the Chinese at this time. These exchanges have to be free from Western paternalism or arrogance.

9. We were impressed by the more tolerant and favorable attitude toward religious practices and beliefs as reflected in the opening of temples, mosques and churches to public worship. The three formal religions are far from dead, but to say they are flourishing would be a distortion. Christian faith, however, is very much alive in the formal, visible church and in the house churches. An ecumenical Protestant church in Chengdu opened in March, 1980, and by fall it had an attendance of around 160 and was growing. The members are hopeful as they live their faith in this situation. We attended midnight mass on Christmas Eve in Shanghai and joined the 5,000 worshippers in an impressive service. When we attended the former Moore Memorial Church in Shanghai, we felt there, too, the liveliness of the faith. The Nanking Seminary is scheduled to open this year. Bibles, using the earlier translation, have been reprinted, and a new translation is in process. In this area, as in all areas, the day of outside intrusion and imperialism is past. The leaders of the three major religions make clear today that they intend to make their religions Chinese rather than an adaptation of foreign religions.

Our experience was enriching. We found a common humanity in our relationships with the Chinese people. Their hopes for themselves and their families and communities have many similarities to our own. Significant achievements have been made, but serious problems are still to be solved. Our discovery of our commonalities also revealed differences in philosophical commitments and directions.

Ross Terrill, China scholar, has said, "It is respect for China that makes it also necessary to raise questions about values." He added, "That is why a visit to China is a spiritual struggle, and to neglect questions would not be to respect China but to demean her." The following questions have been raised by the Chinese and by Terrill, and some have come out of our own experiences:

1. Can China-U.S. relationships continue on the normalization course without being sidetracked by narrow political or economic interests?

2. Can countries with substantial differing political, economic and social ideologies build a base of mutual respect and a common concern for world peace strong enough to transcend the differences and promote cooperation? Such a relationship, as American Ambassador Leonard Woodcock has so clearly stated, must be based on something beyond purely economic motivations or simply having a common enemy.

3. Will China be able to make sufficient progress toward modernization to secure the continuing support of its people? Can this be done without some breakdown of desirable Chinese values and the accumulation of social ills which so often accompany modernization?

4. Can the impact of the Cultural Revolution be reduced or eliminated and can such a devastating detour be prevented in the future?

5. Will the current changes in policies and political outlook continue and be consolidated, or will there be a backlash internally or one caused by a changing U.S. policy?

6. What influence will the new China leadership, that is, the leadership which did not participate in the revolution personally, have on the future? What is replacing Mao's earlier magnetic power to unify Chinese society? How will the fact that China's population is comparatively young, an estimated 450 milllion under 18 years of age, influence the future? How serious is the much discussed "crisis of belief" in China?

7. Over a period of time, what will be the psychological impact of the Chinese pattern of group social interaction, control and social pressures on personality?

8. How can the threat level—mutual China-Russia fear and the U.S.-U.S.S.R. fear syndrome—be reduced? How do we keep from deliberately or accidentally stumbling into the ultimate madness of nuclear war?

9. What roles do education, Chinese and American, and educational exchanges play in building a more peaceful world?

10. What should be the response of the world's Christians, one-fourth of the world's population, to the Chinese, another one-fourth of the world's population? What should Christians' response be to the Christians in China, an estimated one million Protestants and two to three million Catholics?

Only time and developments within China and responses of the rest of the world to China will provide answers to these questions. The U.S. response will be particularly important in these next years. The peace of the world and our own self-interest may well be involved.

The unfulfilled hope for our world was articulated in striking words by a great Chinese poet more than 1,200 years ago. The poet, Tu Fu, speaking out of the dislocation and suffering of that warring period, wrote the poem entitled "On Washing Weapons":

While all scholars will write in praise of PEACE and
WISE RULE. . . . I dream that there
Might come some great man, who
Would bring down the River of Heaven
Cleaning all the WEAPONS of BLOOD,
So that they could be stored away
FOREVER, NEVER TO BE USED AGAIN!

We believe the Goshen-China exchange is one small effort of "taking up residency in someone else's point of view" and is one step toward the renewal of ties between the peoples of the two countries as predicted by the late Premier Chou Enlai. In a 1956 speech to the National People's Congress he said, "China proceeds from the desire to co-exist peacefully with all countries, including the United States. . . . Furthermore, we are deeply convinced that the day will come when the Chinese and the American peoples, because of their traditional friendships, will resume their ties through their respective governments." That time is here.

Atlee Beechy is professor of psychology and peace studies at Goshen College. Winifred Beechy is coordinator of peace and social concerns with the Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries. They served as co-directors of the study-service trimester in the People's Republic of China in the fall of 1980.